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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the development of the concept of a unified world history and applies that concept to the present curriculum. World history became more European-centered over time as other cultures were viewed as backward. The exclusion of so much of humanity from the "known world of progress" made less and less sense over time as global connections increased. Multicultural world history is more inclusive, but it also contains weaknesses in that cultures are entities not bounded by time of space. A unified world history should be a fluid, many-angled world history. The creation of the "National Standards for World History" is an attempt to address some of the omissions of history. The interconnections and interdependencies that have shaped the human experience can be illustrated through the Book of Travels of Ibn Battuta of Tangier who moved from one corner of Eurasia and Africa to another for 29 years in the 14th century. Focus necessarily must be on the interactions of humanity that have always occurred if students are truly to understand world history. (EH)

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WESTERN CIV, MULTICULTURALISM, AND THE PROBLEM OF A UNIFIED WORLD HISTORY

BY

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I'd like to give you one version of a unified history of the world. This is the version that the Yoruba people of West Africa tell.

> Before the creation, the earth was one mass of water. Olodumare, the Supreme Deity and Sky God, summoned Obatala, his vice-regent, to his presence. He charged him with the first act of creation--the "land mass." Accompanied by a five-toed hen and a pigeon and with a calabash containing a piece of dry soil, Obatala descended upon the watery mass to begin his job. He dropped the calabash of soil on the surface of the water and let loose the hen and the pigeon, who anchored the calabash and worked by scattering the soil about. When a portion of the surface had been covered with the soil Obatala turned back with pleasure and reported to Olodumare the successful completion of the work of creating the earth.[1]

Olodumare then sent Obatala back to the land mass, a place called Ife, to create human beings out of clay. Obatala started the job, but he made a mess of it because he drank too much palm wine while he was working. So Olodumare gave up on him and sent another being named Oduduwa to finish the job right. Oduduwa did a good job. He created the first community of humans at Ife and became their leader. Later he sent several of his own sons to found kingdoms in other parts of the region. And that's how the world became populated.

Notice the elements of a unified world history in this story. The land mass of the <u>earth</u> was formed, not just the West African land mass. <u>Human beings</u> were created on the earth, not just Yoruba-speaking human beings. From Yorubaland, where human history started, people went forth to populate the entire world. For later periods of time Yoruba versions of the past abandon this universalism and concentrate on their own region. But the Yoruba <u>have</u> felt compelled to formulate, and then pass on from one generation to the next, an explanation of how the <u>whole</u> world was formed and how <u>humankind</u>, not just members of that ethnic group, came to inhabit it. In fact peoples around the world have told world histories with a similar structure.

Larger-scale societies than the Yoruba, that is, the major urban civilizations, worked out more elaborate versions of unified world history. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all shared a general account of the creating and populating of the world that begins with God's fashioning the earth and the appearing of

that ill-fated pair Adam and Eve. The Judeo-Christian version of early world history is of course found in the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis. Premodern world histories assumed that supernatural power guided the course of events. God (or the gods) not only sent forth humans to populate the earth. God also molds and directs human history from beginning to end. The past has been the unfolding of God's purpose; the future will be the revealing of his divine plan. Mortals may not know how God's design is to unfold, but they can be certain, so this line of reasoning goes, that it will be global in scope!

Teleological accounts of world history, that is, the idea that the course of events conforms to a moral or spiritual purpose, may include a central event on which all else turns. In the Christian tradition that key event is of course the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. St. Augustine divided the past into six successive "world ages." Five of these had to do with Old Testament history. The sixth "world age" started with the birth of Christ. It will terminate at his Second Coming, which will also be the End of Time--for all of us.

In the Middle Ages the subject matter of Christian universal history included details of political, religious, and other events occurring in the centuries following the appearance of Christ. The unified histories that were elaborated up to about 1500 AD may be said to embrace the world, but it could only be the world that the writers of those histories were capable of envisioning. In other words, the definition of what constituted the inhabited world might be quite limited from our modern point of view. I think of the student who came to my office at San Diego State a few years ago and was telling me with great excitement that he had gotten a great summer job "back east." I asked him just where "back east" this job was. He replied, "Phoenix." Here was a young man whose "known world" apparently faded out somewhere just east of the Colorado River!

Likewise, premodern societies normally assumed that the "known world" ended at certain geographical or cultural limits. Beings who lurked beyond those limits (and probably had eyes in their chests, or the heads of dogs, or their feet turned backwards) were excluded from the "world" altogether, dismissed as incomprehensible, subhuman, or morally unworthy of attention. And so medieval Christian chronicles recounting events since the time of Christ focussed on Christendom, that is, on Europe and regions only as far east as the Holy Land. But the conceptualization was still a unified one.

After about 1500 A.D. European scholars by and large lost interest in writing unified world history. This is ironic

because it was just then that long-distance sea communication was linking up Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas. For the first time a genuinely global conception of history, global in the full geographical sense, was becoming possible. But even as Europeans were learning much more about peoples who lived on the far side of Jerusalem, they made little effort to develop new conceptions of universal history. Likewise, Muslims and Chinese, among other peoples who had traditional unified world histories of their own, neglected to come up with interesting new models in response to the great world linkup.

In the European case, one factor was the gradual secularizing of culture. Most Europeans up to the nineteenth century continued to have faith that divine Providence was the drive-wheel of history. Even so, the Christian vision of the universal past, which was rooted in the Bible, tended to become less and less interesting to learned scholars, while practical political affairs and the relations among states commanded more attention. Also, the dream of Charlemagne or the Holy Roman Emperors that the whole world might be organized under the authority of a universal Christian empire was fading out. The competition among secular nation-states--England, France, Spain, and so on--their armies and navies operating around the world--was the new direction of history. The scholar's mission was no longer to erect grand schemes of universal history but to trace the development of the great nations--their languages, institutions, laws, and foreign relations.

I also suspect that the more Europeans learned about the world (and in early modern times they were learning more and learning it faster than Muslim, Chinese, or other peoples of Africa and Eurasia), the less credibility they found in unified world history as a viable enterprise. The world was turning out to be a sphere teeming with empires, kingdoms, tribes, and religions. How could an integral narrative of the human past be constructed? And why bother?

This tendency in the Western tradition to stay away from unified world history continued on into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The nineteenth was the century of science, and scientific attitudes came to pervade historical research and writing. German scholars led the way in arguing that historians should use exacting standards and systematic methods in reconstructing the past. They should devote themselves to collecting, classifying, and meticulously analyzing the written record of the past, not waste their time on fuzzy schemes of world-scale change. Out of this work would surely come the complete, definitive histories of nations.

Nineteenth century nationalism both in Europe and this country also had a profound effect on the way history was written. The ideals of nationalism envisioned a Europe of distinct ethnic and linguistic communities (the Serbs, the Croats, the Albanians, and so on), each striving to achieve a unique cultural destiny and--if it didn't have it already--political independence. According to nationalist ideology, an individual's national heritage was more important than any other heritage. And so, the history of the nation was more important than any other history. To know one's national history was to know a secure social and cultural identity.

One nationalist idea closely linked to European Romanticism--and also to racism--was the notion that nations or peoples have intrinsic cultural characteristics that are unique and are passed from one generation to the next. To be English, for example, is to possess certain cultural, and indeed racial, traits as essential qualities. Nations have souls, many scholars argued, and so historical research should be dedicated to illuminating the unique development and cultural specialness of the national group.

Nationalist, Romanticist history tended to engrain in European thought the idea that most important history takes place inside nations or cultural communities and that the history of a particular people has an autonomous and integrated character that distinguishes it from the histories of other peoples. So despite the great complexity of economic, political, and cultural interrelationships among peoples and nations in the nineteenth century, despite that reality, historians tended to be either indifferent or hostile to the idea of world-scale history.

Nationalism became the dominant political ideology throughout the world in the twentieth century, and so the writing and teaching of national history became more widespread than ever. The practice has of course continued--in Africa and Asia as much as in Europe or the United States. However, two new trends appeared after World War I that looked like they might lead in the direction of unified world history.

The first was the formulation of the idea of "Western Civilization" as part of liberal education in the United States following World War I. The premise of the project was that since ancient times human society has been on a more or less steady path of moral and material progress. The key to human betterment was the persistent struggle that certain people had waged for individual freedom. The evolution of constitutional government and democratic values was evidence of the progressive blossoming of liberty. Young American citizens needed to be instructed in

the deep historical origins of freedom, and the locus of that history was Western civilization.

Here then was a new framework for unified world history to replace the medieval Christian model, though now the teleological element was human progress rather than the working of God's will on Earth. The "known world" of this new world history was somewhat different from the medieval one, but it was also specific, running along a particular geographical track. The railhead was Mesopotamia--where Hammurabi's Code of individual rights and duties was invented. The line then ran to the Near East of the Hebrews, to the Greece of the Athenians, to Republican Rome, medieval England, modern Europe, and North America, the track terminating, I suppose, somewhere in downtown Santa Barbara! In other words, the history of freedom was a world history that shifted in space as well as time. Marshall Hodgson called it the "westward drift of history."

Following this model, world history turned out to be the history of a single civilization because it was the civilization that mattered, the civilization that nurtured material and moral progress, that carried on the struggle for freedom. Americans, even more than Europeans, liked this vision of unified world history because it situated us at the climactic point of centuries of evolution toward a more perfect valuing of individualism and democracy. This was, as Philip Curtin has called it, "world history as American history pushed back through time."

It was also a world history that excluded a very large part of the globe in a geographic and demographic sense. As History (with a capital H) slid westward from Mesopotamia, peoples of Southwest Asia and Mediterranean Africa disappeared into a void. Peoples of tropical Africa, the Americas before 1492, and much of Asia did not figure at all except in recent periods as objects of Western imperialism or recipients of Western culture. It was not that these other peoples were dogheads or had eyes in their chests. It was that their societies were static, traditional, unprogressive, and therefore without history.

Even though such views persisted in academic circles long after World War II, that conflict and its aftermath jarred an increasing number of educated Americans to question the Western Civ model of world history, as intellectually coherent as it appeared to be. For many the exclusion of so much of humanity from the "known world of progress" made less and less sense in the context of the international Cold War, the maturing of the United Nations, the rise of mass nationalist movements in Asia and Africa, global communications, and numerous other conditions

of post-war life. Western Civ, however, continued to be the dominant introductory course in American high schools and universities. And in so far as teachers have not explicitly told students that Western Civ is not world history, it continues to be presented as a version of unified world history.

A second version of world history appeared after World War II that challenged the Western Civ model. This was the movement for multi-civilizational history, or if you like, multicultural world history. Both global politics and historical research were revealing to Americans the rich pasts of China, India, the Islamic Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Precolumbian America, and other regions. European scholars had at least since the eighteenth century recognized the existence of other rich cultural traditions besides Europe. But now it was asserted that these other traditions had, to use Trevor-Roper's term, "movement." If several genuine civilizations not only shared the global past but posssessed histories worth thinking about, then might not world history be defined as the comparative study of civilizations?

The astonishing outpouring of scholarly research on the history of Asia, Africa, and Latin America after World War II eventually led to the publication of many new textbooks and university courses in multicultural world history. The single most influential historian in this development was William McNeill. His monumental study The Rise of the West presented a model of how change has occurred in the world as a whole, a model that was firmly grounded in academic history and anthropology, not speculative metahistory. This new multicultural history did not supersede the world-history-as-Western-Civ tradition, but it provided a powerful alternative.

Multicultural world history was inclusive history. Its "known world" genuinely reached just about everybody. It was history for an era of American involvement around the world. The problem was that as unified world history, the model was even less satisfying than Western Civ. Multicultural history's universalism amounted to a division humankind into several, more or less equal universes. The elegant narrative of Western Civ was replaced by seven or eight complicated story lines. The human community did not have a history. Only civilizations did. Only culture groups did.

Multicultural world history, moreover, did not escape the heritage of nineteenth century Romantic nationalism. It perpetuated the argument--in expanded form--that civilizations, or in more general terms cultures, may reasonably be thought to exist as bounded entities. The great cultures of world history

were assumed to be homogeneous and autonomous, and the present of those cultures could adequately be explained by referring only to their internal pasts. Indeed, the notion of world history as the study of "cultures" is an insidious one and at base ahistorical. The "culture" (the culture we call India, the culture we call Islam, and so on) is like a large building. It doesn't move but remains firmly fixed. It has rooms and furnishings that don't go up or down or sideways or disappear and reappear. It's all of a piece. And it isn't anything like human societies, which are continuously in a state of change.

This idea of a culture or civilization as an "integrated totality," to use a phrase of Eric Wolf, has nonetheless persisted. A historian well-known in the field of curricular reform wrote in 1987 that "the purpose of world history is precisely to capture the essence of each major world civilization."[2] It seems to me, however, that the very notion of civilizations having "essences," that is, inherent, timeless characteristics, descends directly from nineteenth century Romantic thought. It also recalls the anthropological functionalism of the 1940s and 50s, which posited the idea of a culture being a closed system of exquisitely intermeshing parts.

The logic of a relentlessly multiculturist approach to the past in the end kills off unified world history. By definition it is fundamentally concerned with the differences among peoples and on magnifying distinctions between "us" and the "other." Now, cultural differences are perfectly valid topics of investigation. But in so far as cultures are perceived as essentialized entities, they deny even the possibility of world history. As Edward Said asks:

> Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences? . . . For such divisions are generalities whose use historically and actually has been to press the importance of the distinctions between some men and some other men. . . . The result is usually to polarize the distinction--the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western--and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies.[3]

Fortunately for the possibilities of unified world history, cultures or civilizations are not billiard balls that exist "out there" on the global pool table. They are in fact human representations of cultural materials that seem to our eyes to cluster together, exhibit interdependence, and cohere for relatively long periods of time. Yet in fact the cultural bits that make up these clusters operate for the most part

independently of one another, and they are subject to continuous transformation over time. There are in fact no cultures as "integrated totalities." There are, Eric Wolf says, "only cultural sets of practices and ideas, put into play by determinate human actors under determinate circumstances. In the course of action, these cultural sets are forever assembled, dismantled, and reassembled."[4]

I don't deny that civilizations exist in very real ways and that "civilization" is a useful analytical category. But in the history of the world, the cultural clusters that we see as civilizations have been much more permeable, heterogenous, and ephemeral than we have been accustomed to think. For example, to get civilizations to look like billiard balls, we have to imagine that people do not possess multiple cultural identities that displace or overlap one another, when in fact they nearly always do. We also have to imagine that civilizations lie neatly within the colorful blobs we assign to them on maps, when in fact the cultural, social, and economic boundaries between them are usually very fuzzy.

If culture groups, then, are not the essentialized realities we thought they were, then maybe there is a chance for unified world history. But on what conceptual basis?

First of all, I do not believe that we are ever going to find a satisfactory central narrative possessing the elegant beauty of the Western Civ or the medieval Christian model. But we can, I think, construct a world history that neither privileges a single civilized tradition nor defeats itself by dividing the world into a series of imagined "integrated totalities." We can construct a world history that identifies different, often much larger realms of significant human interaction than the culture area and that brings to the fore those developments that involved peoples of different languages and cultural identities in shared experience.

This approach assumes that humanity possesses a common history and that many of the most important processes of change in the world's past have not been culture specific. World history could not possibly be about "everything," but a unified world history should be a fluid, many-angled world history, not locked into imagined culture systems as steel-ribbed categories of analysis. This alternative approach, to paraphrase something Ohio State's Marilyn Waldman said, encourages teachers, curriculum planners, and textbook writers to pay less attention to deciding which cultures to include in the program (or how many weeks to spend on each), and much more to selecting the questions we want students to ask about the human past. This approach

starts out, not by choosing the countries or civilizations to study, but by asking historical questions that are worth asking, Students are then set to range freely around the world, embracing whatever aggregate of human beings is relevant--and that may be a single civilized tradition--to get answers to the questions being posed, paying no attention to arbitrary culture constructs and boundaries. When we do this we begin to find that East Africans and South Asians, Canadians and Russians, Persians and Chinese, Americans and Mexicans, suddenly come together in shared realms of historical meaning.

The effort to find ways to teach world history in the schools that is intelligible, coherent, rigorous, and satisfying is really just getting under way. Now, some of you may have heard about a recent project called the National History Standards. I have to admit to you that I am one of the "burned out 60s radical post-modern revisionists" that participated in the project! (This conservative coat and tie I'm wearing is just a disguise. I will switch back to my beads and sandals after lunch.) Perhaps I don't have to tell you that this scary image of the people who produced the history standards is fictitious, the concoction of a small group of hostile critics, none of them teachers. The drafters and reviewers of the standards were in fact veteran hometown teachers from places like Soldotna Alaska, Middlebury Vermont and Columbus Ohio. Dozens of them served as writers and reviewers.

What do the National Standards for World History do to advance us toward a more integrated conceptualization of the subject? By their nature they cannot do nearly all that needs to be done. The standards are presented as a set of guidelines for helping to develop in students both critical thinking skills and concrete "understandings" of the human past, including the major civilizations. The topical guidelines are backed up by suggested classroom activities, nearly 2,600 of them in the U.S. and world history standards volumes combined. The world history standards are not intended to be a textbook nor a prescribed curricular design. They will not tell teachers how to go to school on Monday morning and teach a unified world history because they were written with the understanding that teachers are stubborn, ornery creatures and are going to insist on approaching the problem in their own ways. The standards provide, rather, a marvelous resource for getting at the problem.

The world history standards do embody certain commitments. One is that schools should teach world history that embraces humanity--not every empire and ethnic group that ever existed but also not just the history of Europe presented to students as though it were world history.

A second commitment is for world history that treats the great civilizations, including Western civilization, not as closed, autonomous narratives, but rather encourages teachers and textbooks to situate civilizations within historical contexts larger than themselves. In the world history volume, standards are not organized civilization by civilization but are presented in eight chronological eras from paleolithic times to the present. This organization is designed to encourage classrooms to compare and contrast developments in different parts of the world and to ask some of the big questions about change in human society. I believe, for example, that students will better understand the immense role that Europe and Europeans have played in the world in the past 500 years if the framework for studying that role is global.

A third commitment is the invitation to teachers to give some attention to the interactive dimensions of world history--those developments that cut straight across cultural and linguistic boundaries and that involved peoples of differing origins and languages in shared experience. One standard encourages students to "assess ways in which the exchange of plants and animals between the Americas and Afro-Eurasia in the late 15th and the 16th centuries affected European, Asian, African, and American Indian societies and commerce." Another one invites them to " describe major shifts in world population and urbanization in [the 1750-1914 era] and to analyze how such factors as industrialization, migration, changing diets, and scientific and medical advances affected world-wide demographic trends."[5]

The point I want to make is that if we look upon world history as merely the study of cultures we won't even recognize such questions as these even though they are eminently pertinent to understanding how the world got to be the way it is. Let me reassure you AP European history teachers out there that the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment hold prominent places in the standards too, though attention is also given to the global impact of these movements in the past two centuries

In short, I believe that the world history standards--which are yours to draw on as a resource, not your new "official history"--will help teachers and curriculum specialists steer an innovative course between the two older models I have been talking about. One is the traditional Western Civ as world history approach, which I cannot believe is the wave of the future. The other is the "world cultures" approach, which tends to reify civilizations and regions as static entities, emphasizes to potentially disastrous extremes the "differences" among the world's peoples, and does little to sensitize students to the

interconnections and interdependencies that have shaped the human experience.

I'd like to illustrate a bit more concretely how I think the world history standards give support to the effort toward a more unified world history. One of the standards calls upon students to "demonstrate understanding of how interregional communication and trade led to intensified cultural exchanges among diverse peoples of Eurasia and Africa" in the period 1000-1500 A.D.[7] This guideline, as well as standards calling for study of the world historical significance of the Mongol Empire and the Black Death, is premised on the idea that in some sense Africa and Eurasia together constituted in those centuries a single field of historical interaction, a place on the map--the Eastern Hemisphere--that was developing a kind of history of its own.

I had the opportunity to ponder this idea at length in connection with researching and writing about the life and times of one Abu Abdallah Muhammad ibn Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Lawati ibn Battuta al-Tanji, or better known in the history books simply as Ibn Battuta.

He was born in Tangier on the northern coast of Morocco in 1304 in the time of the Marinid kingdom. His family had a reputation as Muslim legal scholars, and he was given a basic education in Islamic law and the religious sciences, as good an education as a provincial town like Tangier could provide. In 1325 he set out to make the Holy Pilgrimage to Mecca and to study law in the great intellectual centers of the Islamic heartland--notably Cairo and Damascus. He might have been expected to return home after a year or two to take up a profession as a judge or other government official. Instead he decided to travel. For fully twenty-nine years he moved from one corner of Eurasia and Africa to another, visiting by my estimation the equivalent of about fifty modern countries, including Tanzania, Russia, India, China, Spain, and Mali. Sometimes he traveled to improve his education, sometimes to sit at the feet of Sufi mystics, sometimes to look for a job, and sometimes just because a ship or camel caravan was going his way. He spent about eight years in India, most of that time serving as a judge in the Muslim Sultanate of Delhi. After he finally returned home in 1354, the ruler of Morocco ordered him to write an account of his adventures. That account has come down to us as the Rihla or Book of Travels of Ibn Battuta.[7]

I did not discover him. He is in fact one of the most famous historical figures in the Islamic world. I became interested in writing about his colorful career because of what he illustrates about the interactive character of human societies

of Eurasia and Africa in the late premodern centuries. He did not travel as a man wandering from one foreign country or strange culture to another. Rather he was an 'alim, a well-educated religious scholar, who moved from city to city along a network of routes that criss-crossed what Muslims called the Dar al-Islam, or House of Islam. This was the region where Islam was politically or religiously dominant, or at least well represented by communities of Muslims. Contrary to what the "world cultures" approach might teach, the land of Islam was not synonymous with the Middle East. Rather it embraced a region of Africa and Eurasia stretching from Iberia, Morocco, and Mali in the West to Indonesia in the East, from the Volga River basin in the north to Tanzania in the south. The Islam of Ibn Battuta's time may be described as a civilization, but it was one that defies the usual culture-area category because it was continuously expanding in the 1000-1500 period to embrace an immense diversity of peoples.

Ibn Battuta journeyed from one end of the Hemisphere to the other without ever losing contact with fellow Muslims who shared not only his religion, but also his languages (Arabic and Persian), his legal norms, his moral proprieties, and his social manners. The region of Islamic dominance was not so much a place on the map as a set of complex social relations. Almost everywhere Ibn Battuta went, he associated with the same sort of people and the same sort of Muslim institutions--mosque community, college of higher learning, Sufi lodge, princely palace, or caravansary. The nodes where these institutions clustered were cities, not countries. Ibn Battuta, as a pious legal scholar, was an exemplary member of the Muslim cosmopolitan class. His primary loyalty was not to a country called Morocco but to the House of Islam and to its city network.

One of the most fascinating aspects of his 74,000 or so miles of travels back and forth across the Eastern Hemisphere was that he was constantly running into people he knew. He was acquainted, for example, with a family of merchants, the al-Bushri family, who came from the city of Ceuta, which is not far from his hometown of Tangier. When he visited China he ran into a member of this family who was in trade in a South China city, 8,000 miles from home. A few years later Ibn Battuta was traveling in the Sahara Desert south of Morocco, and there he ran into this man's brother! The al-Bushris, like Forrest Gump, really got around!

Ibn Battuta's career (and it wasn't so exceptional--he just wrote a book about it) wonderfully reflects the remarkable comings and goings of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, movement that was eminently "deterritorialized" and that involved populations of migrating nomads, conquering armies, and hundreds

of thousands of merchants, missionaries, scholars, and pilgrims. Africa and Eurasia together were the scene of developments aside from the expansion of Islam that cut promiscuously across conventionally conceived culture regions and that, as historical topics of eminent teachability, cannot begin to be addressed within the confines of culture history.

The most spectacular development was the rise of the empire of Chinggis Khan, and later the appearance of a string of interlinked Mongol empires that extended from Eastern Europe to Korea. Ibn Battuta traveled during the twilight of the age of Mongol dominance, a time when a relatively few, large, prosperous kingdoms--some Mongol, some not--kept law and order and policed the long-distance routes of communication. The stories of Chinggis Khan, Marco Polo, the Silk Roads and the Southern Sea routes, the Mongol invasion of Poland and Hungary, the exchange of new technology across the Hemisphere--all these stories are eminently teachable.

A second development, a grim one, was the Black Death of the mid fourteenth century. The great plague pandemic was not a European event (though the Western Civ model leads us to think it was) but almost certainly a Hemispheric one. It probably reduced the populations of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East by about one third. Similar mortality may have occurred in Central Asia and China. The plague is therefore likely to have been a major causative factor in demographic, economic, social, and political transformations simultaneously in all the major culture regions of Eurasia and North Africa in the later fourteenth century. Ibn Battuta traveled through Syria and Egypt at the time of the Black Death and survived to tell about it in his book. Perhaps he took the preventive measures that Muslim physicians prescribed, covering his bed with flower petals, sprinkling his room with rose water and vinegar, and eating

plenty of pickled onions. A poignant note: his mother died of plague in Tangier only several months before he returned home.

In sum then, the search for a unified world history is not merely a recognition that discrete culture areas interacted with one another to a larger degree in premodern times than we thought--that the billiard balls knocked together more often than we imagined. Rather it is recognition that the histories of particular peoples have always been embedded in contexts of human interaction that extend beyond their cultural boundaries. The "culture" as an independent historical world is a delusion.

Even more important here is the idea that a significant event occurring in one part of the world might set off a chain reaction, disrupting and rearranging numerous existing interrelationships over a more or less extensive area. That a surge of change in one network of relationships might set off changes in other kinds of relationships. It is reasonable to argue, for example, that between the start of the thirteenth century (when the Mongol empire arose) and the end of the fourteenth (when the plague pandemic was playing itself out) the Eastern Hemisphere as a whole became significantly restructured, politically, economically, socially, culturally, and epidemiologically. As Marshall Hodgson, the great pioneer of world history, argues, it was not simply that all the major civilizations were changed inconsequence of the disruptions of those two centuries. It was that the "disposition of the Hemisphere" was altered.[8]

Medieval Europe, which receives abundant attention in the world history standards, naturally fits into that history. I think the European Middle Ages will make more sense to students if they are encouraged to relate it in a variety of ways to this trans-hemispheric pageant. For example, the Magna Carta was promulgated by a minor king and a raucous military aristocracy on a largish island at the western end of Eurasia. The signing of such a document as this was an odd and highly unlikely event in a world of autocrats and massive imperial structures. And therein lies the wonder of it!

I have not intended here to argue against the study of civilizations or cultural diversity. It's obvious that our distinctive cultural experience and communal lives protect and enrich us and ought to be celebrated. In our enthusiasm for multicultural education and internationalized curricula, howver, the interactive dimensions of history have remained an underdeveloped subject. The world we live in is restructuring itself continually, and we are constantly subjected to forces that can only be understood in transnational or global terms. The same world that produces the narrowest, crudest nationalisms

is also a world where interests and loyalties are strikingly deterritorialized. Moreover, did the world get like this yesterday? Could we go back far enough in time to find a world of atomized, self-contained societies, each moving along its own track, uninvolved with its neighbors and unresponsive to developments occurring in a wider scene? Would the Upper Paleolithic be far enough back? Probably not.

Can we expect American citizens to fully understand and address the problems of an interdependent world, the one "integrated totality" there is, if schools continue to present the past as though the connections among peoples did not matter until the twentieth century? Students need not only a multicultural education but also what Andre Gunder Frank calls a "humanocentric" one. They need not only an appreciation of the Chinese or West African achievement but also a conceptual architecture for thinking about the sources of change that are geographically indiscriminate, that slice right through what we imagine to be separate cultural worlds.

May future students achieve the world-historical vision of one Wang Li, who lived in China in the fourteenth century at the end of the Mongol Age. Surveying the events of the previous century he wrote:

> By the time of [Kubilai Khan] the land within the Four Seas had become the territory of one family, civilization had spread everywhere, and no more barriers existed. For people in search of fame and wealth in north and south, a journey of a thousand li was like a trip next door, while a journey of ten thousand li constituted just a neighborly jaunt. . . . Brotherhood among peoples has certainly reached a new plane."[9]

NOTES

1. Quoted in Richard M. Dawson, ed., African Folklore (Anchor: Garden City, NY, 1972), pp. 322-23.

2. Paul Gagnon, Democracy's Untold Story: What World History Textbooks Neglect (Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers, 1987), p. 40

3. Edward W. Said, Orientalism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 45-46.

4. Eric R. Wolf, Europe and the People without History (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 390-91.

5. National Standards for World History: Exploring Paths to the Present, National Center for History in the Schools, University of California, Los Angeles, 1994, pp. 172 and 242.

6. National Standards for World History, p. 138.

7. See Ross E. Dunn, The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, a Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

8. See Marshall G.S. Hodgson, Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History, edited with an introduction and conclusion by Edmund Burke III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

9. Quoted in Jerry H. Bentley, Old World Encounters (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 111.